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Speaking Notes for
The Honourable Anne McLellan

Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

Alberta Crime Prevention Announcement

May 12th, 2000
Edmonton, Alberta

As-delivered

Thank you very much, colleagues. Good morning everyone. It is a great pleasure to be back here at the Abbotsfield Recreation Centre. I had the pleasure of coming here a few months ago and visiting with some of the young people who participate in programs run out of this facility. I also had the chance to talk with other community members about some of the challenges that they face. I had the opportunity to meet with some of the police officers who work in this community and it was a tremendous opportunity for me to see firsthand how communities work together to identify challenges, concerns and problems and then put together strategies to ensure that they have safer homes and safer communities.

Let me say first of all it is a great pleasure, with the upcoming Crime Prevention Week, to be here with my colleague, David Hancock. Let me say that the federal government and the province of Alberta have been able to work very constructively in partnership on a whole range of projects and nowhere is that more true than in our commitment to crime prevention and community-based crime prevention. I know, David, you will say a little bit more about that because it is something you believe in profoundly, as do I.

So let me just say up front that I appreciate the relationship I have had with the Attorney General of Alberta — he and I share many of the same goals for our communities all over this province. So I thank you, David, for your commitment to community-based crime prevention.

Today, I'm pleased to announce that the Government of Canada is once again supporting Albertans in their efforts to build safer and stronger communities. Under the National Crime Prevention Strategy, we will be providing more than $800,000 to 27 crime prevention projects throughout our province. These are unique kinds of community investments. There will be no brick and mortar. Rather these are direct investments in people and in the quality of their lives. They will succeed by helping to keep Albertan communities healthy and vibrant places in which to live.

These projects, each in their own way, offer thoughtful and creative responses to the difficult and complex issues of crime and victimization. They illustrate the belief and the guiding principle of the National Strategy that our justice system must do more to prevent the root causes of crime and deal with the factors like poor literacy skills, poverty, homelessness and violence in the home that can lead children, young people and adults towards criminal activities in the first place. The National Strategy is developing community-based responses to crime with a particular emphasis on children and youth, Aboriginal people and women. Young people figure prominently in today's announcement. In fact, about 40% of the projects either work for or with young people in our

province.

Take, for example, the project sponsored by the Beverly Towne Community Development Society. I know that Colleen Fidler will want to discuss its merits with you more fully, but it is a project that amply demonstrates the main thrust of the National Strategy. Agencies, schools, community groups and residents will work together to develop positive alternatives to gang-related activity for youth. By cutting off the supply of potential new gang members, by providing options and choices to young people, the partnership will reduce the impact of gang-related crime in our communities.

Another project that you will hear about shortly is the Community Connections Project, sponsored by the Dickinsfield Community Partnership. While Michelle Fillion will detail their collaborative effort, I want to point out that the goal of the Community Connections Project is to mobilize residents into taking action on community concerns so as to create a safer environment for young families.

Now, I think it is fair to say that everything we know tells us that this is the best approach. The good ideas found in these projects affirm our basic instinct in relation to what we need to do to create safe communities, but I think if further evidence were ever required, we will do well to consider the lost potential of a young life going in the wrong direction, of a neighbourhood victimized by fear and of society starting to turn inward and we may want to remember that it costs about $100,000 to incarcerate a young person who breaks the law, anywhere between $40,000 to $80,000 for an adult criminal and over $10 billion to maintain the criminal justice system in our country.

At that point, crime prevention is not just good common sense. It is also good economic sense. Investments at the front end in children, young people and family can reduce the burden on economy, our society and our communities. The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention is premised on the belief that preventing crime and encouraging community safety are big jobs and they are jobs that are beyond the scope of any one idea, any one plan or any one government.

Safer communities will be built by individuals like you and they will be built one family at a time, one child at a time, one community at a time, because, ladies and gentlemen, as we all know, what we want ultimately are safer homes, safer communities. We want to ensure that every child lives in a family that is loving and supportive with a safe place in which to be — that every child gets a good start in life. At the end of the day, that is how we actually create those safe communities, those safe streets that we all want.

So I just want to thank everybody for being here today to support community-based crime prevention. Let me say that I want to especially acknowledge the members of the Edmonton City Police who are here today because I think too often in our lives, in society, we leave issues of safe communities and safe streets up to the police. We say, "That's your job" and in fact, it is their job, but it is also our job and I think working together, working together with the police, working together with the businesses in our communities, the schools, the parents and the kids who live in our community, if we all pool our resources and bring our expertise and our perspective and abilities to the table, that is how we create community-based programs that deal with the root causes of crime. So I particularly want to thank the Edmonton Police Force for its strong commitment to crime prevention and community-based crime prevention — I know David and I both look forward to working with you in the months ahead to ensure that we are doing everything we can together, working with local communities for those safe streets and safe homes.

So, thank you all very much for coming. Your presence here today is a strong indication of community commitment to getting involved and working together to have those safer communities. So on behalf of the Government of Canada, thank you all very much for being here. Good luck with the projects that have been announced today for your local communities. Good luck to everybody across our province who got involved and sat down with their communities to decide what they could do by working together to create safer homes and safer streets.

Thank you all very much and have a wonderful day.

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